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ABSTRACT

The Memphis (Tennessee) Center for Urban Partnerships (MCUP) was formed in 1992 to provide access, resources, and opportunities so that a greater number of urban students might realize their potential and achieve success through increased college preparedness, matriculation, retention, and graduation. This document reports on the development and assessment of strategic planning as a second level activity in the pilot school cluster of a particular neighborhood in Memphis. A planning model was developed to be field tested in five schools. Training in the strategic planning process was implemented to introduce the ecological systems model used in planning, management, and assessment. Information from the four cooperating groups (university researchers, school district personnel, school principals, and school leadership teams) was analyzed to evaluate the training they received in the planning process. Major findings include: continue to use corporate trainers in future planning training; insure all constituencies are included in school improvement planning; continue to provide substitute teachers to allow for training to take place off-campus; provide summary notes of previous sessions to participants of follow-up training; and stress importance of analyzing data prior to and during training. Two tables summarize planning activities and training. (Contains 3 references.) (SLD)

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The University of Memphis
Memphis, TN 38152

Strategic Planning for Urban School Reform: Design and Evaluation, 1993-94

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Introduction

The Memphis Center for Urban Partnerships (MCUP) was formed in 1992 to provide access, resources, and opportunities so that a greater number of urban students might realize their potential and achieve success by means of increased college preparedness, matriculation, retention, and graduation from postsecondary institutions. Goals for the Memphis Partnership were established during the 1992-93 Stage I planning year; Memphis City Schools, The University of Memphis, LeMoyne-Owen College, and Shelby State Community College were identified as the major partners. A cluster of schools serving the Frayser neighborhood of Memphis were selected as pilot sites.

The Partnership seeks to change Memphis into a learning community dedicated to providing supportive, safe, academically challenging, and success-oriented learning environments. Major focus of the Stage II plan implemented in 1993-94, the start-up year for Partnership activities, was on systemic change strategies that could assist school and community leaders in restructuring the schools. As part of this focus, MCUP implemented various programs to enhance the academic success of at-risk preK-12 public school students and African American postsecondary students. An ecological systems model was adapted for use in planning, management, and assessment. Stage II evaluative data collection, analysis, and assessment were designed to describe and assess systemic changes reflected at four levels. These are identified as follows:

Level I: State system of education; school district; partnership network

Level II: The pilot school cluster

Level III: School classrooms or grade-level cohorts

Level IV: Interventions impacting individual students

Reported here is information pertaining to the development and assessment of strategic planning as a Level II activity in the pilot school cluster which serves the Frayser neighborhood of Memphis, Tennessee.

Rationale for Strategic Planning

The need for a strategic planning model to be implemented in Memphis City Schools emerged from a district-wide reorganization featuring decentralization and site-based management. In August 1993, principals were directed to prepare annual school improvement plans that would be submitted for approval by the superintendent. Following a review of the initial plans, the superintendent acknowledged that school leaders needed opportunities to improve their competencies in planning and to develop skills in participatory management. Thus, when asked, "What one thing would you like assistance with?", the superintendent responded, "Help my principals learn how to do strategic planning." This request was congruent with MCUP's mission. In addition, the request was a perfect match for the MCUP/Volunteer Center activity involving development of a Volunteers-in-the-Schools (VIS) program. Leadership of the Volunteer Center assisted in identifying individuals who could develop a strategic planning model for piloting in MCUP sites.

Development of the Model

A team of individuals representing Memphis-area corporations (International Paper Company, Federal Express, and a business consultant), the school district, and the Partnership was assembled to function as a planning team. At its first meeting in January 1994, the planning team began to incorporate principles of strategic planning and Total Quality Management (TQM) into a planning model to be field tested in public schools. The team established the following objectives:

1. Develop a plan for schools to utilize strategic planning and TQM principles in formulating school improvements;
2. Pilot the plan in the MCUP schools in 1994-95; and
3. Utilize lessons learned from the pilot schools to develop guidelines for use by other schools in the district.

Initial meetings of the planning team became intense seminars as members presented their views of strategic planning and management. Readings were exchanged and reviewed between meetings. Finally, the team adopted a set of governing ideas to direct the process: (a) "Learning Organization" (Senge, 1990) would be the construct of the school in which planning and education must occur; (b) "SWOT" (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats; Herman, 1993) was identified as the strategy for analyzing data and establishing the school's mission, values and priorities; (c) "Ladder of Abstraction" was selected as a guide for anchoring discussions on data; and (d) "Strategic Deployment" (Lieber, 1984) was designated as the technique for selecting major goals and identifying major tactics to be deployed. (For additional information regarding these constructs, see the training materials in the Appendix.) After completion of the strategic planning model, the planning team developed training materials, designated several implementation activities, identified the participants, and devised a schedule of activities (see Table 1).

Training sessions, to be conducted by the consultants for school teams, were scheduled during school hours in the 1994 spring semester. Community representatives and parents were invited to participate. The school system agreed to provide substitute teachers during the training session, and MCUP agreed to cover other expenses. Thus, steps 1-6 of the implementation process were completed by May 1994. Initial improvement plans for 1994-95 were submitted for school district review in June 1994.

Implementation of the Training and Preparation of Plans

Two or three days of training were scheduled during April and May 1994, for representatives from each of the five schools. In one school, representatives were members of the Site-Based Decision Making Committee, elected by the school faculty. Principals, teachers, parents, students, and community representatives served on all teams. School district personnel from the Center for Drug Free Schools (CDFS) served as

Table 1

Schedule of Activities and Participants: MCUP Strategic Planning Training

Activity	Participants	Time
1. Interviews with School Administrators	Planning Team	January 1994
2. Overview of Plan for Schools a. Welcome and Expectations b. "Learning Organization" c. Mission and Values d. Strategy Deployment e. Selecting a Planning Team f. Assignments	Planning Team Superintendent Principals Project Staff	1/2 day
3. Development of SWOT's, Vision, and Mission	School Teams	1 day
4. Strategy Deployment Process a. Objectives Set b. Priorities Established c. Measures Identified d. Resources Planned e. Assignments Made f. Time Table Established	School Teams	2 days
5. Development of Action Plans	School Teams	2-4 weeks
6. Review of Action Plans	School Teams	1/2 day
7. Submission of Action Plans for Approval	School Teams	June 1994
8. Implementation of Plans	School Teams	1994-95
9. Evaluation of Training	Evaluation Team	Summer 1994
10. Refinement of Model, Training Materials, and Implementation Strategy	Evaluation Team Project Staff District Personnel	Summer 1994
11. Dissemination of Model and Results	MCS personnel	August 1994
12. Evaluation of Pilot Implementation	Evaluation Team	Spring 1995

resources and assisted in handling logistics relative to the training. By serving as participant observers, school district personnel learned the model so that they could assist in future dissemination within the system.

All five school leadership teams developed 1994-95 school improvement plans. These were submitted to the superintendent in June 1994.

Assessment of the Strategic Planning Model and Training

The Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at The University of Memphis arranged for university researchers to attend all training sessions to collect evaluative information. Researchers recorded training sessions on audio tape, prepared written field notes, and provided evaluative information in a focus group session scheduled at the conclusion of the training. School representatives responded to an evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix) at the conclusion of the sessions. Group interviews were conducted with school district personnel to obtain additional evaluative information.

Through use of triangulation procedures, information obtained from four groups of individuals (university researchers, school district personnel, school principals, and school leadership teams) was analyzed. Major findings are summarized below.

University Researchers

A group interview session was conducted with the university researchers following the strategic planning training sessions. The following suggestions and comments were made:

- Continue use of the corporate trainers in future planning training. They possess technical expertise and high credibility.
- Insure that all constituencies are included in school improvement planning, including administrators, teachers, school support personnel, parents, and students.
- Continue to provide substitute teachers to allow for training to take place off-campus and within a specified period of time.

• Provide summary notes of previous sessions to participants of follow-up training sessions. Groups needed a considerable amount of time to refocus on tasks.

• Stress the importance of analyzing the data prior to and during the training. Emphasize that the process is "data-driven."

School District Personnel

School district counselors indicated that the trainers were a major strength associated with the training and planning model. The trainers' industrial and business backgrounds gave them instant credibility with school personnel. While there were style differences among the trainers, these differences were viewed as a strength in the process, facilitating adaptation to group contexts.

Design of the training process was viewed as appropriate. Although four days were considered adequate, with a break between major assignments, five days were viewed as optimal because some activities require a great deal of time. Conducting the training at a site other than the school was viewed as valuable, fostering positive perceptions of the district's commitment to the training.

The counselors reported two communication-related problems: (a) communications from district personnel to the principals, and (b) expectations concerning outcomes of the training. Another problem related to the use of data in decision making, including resistance to use of the data and a lack of training in data interpretation.

Recommendations included the following:

• School teams should receive training in data interpretation and use.

• Teams should have broader representation (teachers, support personnel, parents, students, community members, and school board representatives).

• Follow-up is needed in each school site if the process is to be successful.

• District personnel should provide strong support to the principals implementing the planning process.

School Administrators

On June 13, 1994, a feedback session was held with the principals. At this session, school district representatives were also present. A member of the corporate planning team planned and coordinated the meeting.

The following were identified by school administrators as strengths of the strategic planning training:

- format, especially the action steps,
- SWOT,
- use of cards to solicit and organize ideas,
- focus on development of a plan that could be readily used,
- written plans prepared before the end of the training sessions,
- knowledgeable facilitators who reflected openness,
- group interactions and consensus building involving all participants,
- involvement of a diverse group in developing the plans, and
- off-site training.

Weaknesses identified by school administrators were:

- emphasis on business and industry applications,
- equal treatment of all issues and concerns, even minor ones, which were identified in the sessions,
- changing of facilitators during the training,
- time spent on informing facilitators about school procedures and limitations,
- length of training (four days is too long; two days would be sufficient),
- inadequate time spent on writing and reviewing the plans,
- raising of expectations that may not be met, and
- timing within school year (too much time at the wrong time of the school year).

Needs articulated by the principals included the following:

- technical assistance in data collection and interpretation,

• uniform format for submitting completed school improvement plans,

• clarification regarding what is to be done in the training, including clear objectives stated at the beginning,

• follow-up sessions with facilitators,

• strategies for gaining commitment of faculty in implementing plans, and

• selection of school team members who can work with the principals.

School Teams

A questionnaire (see Appendix) was developed and administered to training session participants to solicit their responses to the training and their understandings of strategic planning. In Table 2, summary results yielded by the closed-ended items are reported by school and for the total group (N=56).

Information reported in Table 2 indicates a high level of satisfaction. The percentages of all participants reporting excellent on the items related to training, items 1-8, ranged from 59% to 80%. Ratings by school, however, reflect considerable variation.

Overall, participant ratings of their understanding of strategic planning, items 9-18, ranged from 30% to 56%. Considerable variation by school team is apparent.

A summary of open-ended comments related to the training is presented below.

Topics/activities suggested for future training. The following topics or activities were suggested for inclusion in future training sessions:

• staff development (team building, conflict resolution, communications) (4 responses),

• training for the entire school faculty (2 responses),

• strategies for developing parental involvement (2 responses),

• implementing/managing improvement plans (2 responses),

• assistance in writing school improvement plans,

• identifying and utilizing community resources,

• focus on what schools already have in place,

ble 2.

nmary of Item Percents for the Evaluation of MCUP Strategic Planning Training by School, Spring, 1994

	TOTALS		SCHOOL 1		SCHOOL 2		SCHOOL 3		SCHOOL 4		SCHOOL 5	
Aspects of the training:	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean
New information provided	67	4.7	67	4.7	75	4.8	85	4.9	67	4.7	46	4.4
Practical application of information provided	63	4.6	85	4.9	75	4.8	77	4.7	67	4.7	15	4.1
Relevance of information to school needs/concerns	80	4.7	85	4.9	75	4.8	92	4.9	89	4.9	62	4.2
Activities utilized in the training	63	4.5	92	4.9	63	4.5	85	4.9	56	4.4	15	3.8
Quality of the materials provided	64	4.6	85	4.9	75	4.6	77	4.6	56	4.6	31	4.2
Organization of the training schedule	59	4.5	85	4.9	63	4.6	62	4.5	89	4.9	8	3.8
Response of participants to the training	71	4.6	92	4.9	50	4.5	85	4.7	78	4.8	46	4.2
Overall rating of the training	73	4.6	85	4.9	71	4.7	85	4.6	78	4.8	46	4.2
Current level of understanding related to:	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean
Elements of the strategic planning model	54	4.3	67	4.5	65	4.5	54	4.5	33	4.1	50	4.1
Relevance of the model to school improvements	53	4.3	50	4.2	75	4.8	62	4.4	44	4.2	39	4.1
Timeline for implementing the model	36	4.0	58	4.3	38	4.0	46	4.1	33	4.0	8	3.6
Role of the school leadership team in implementing the model	52	4.3	54	4.3	75	4.8	62	4.5	33	4.2	39	4.0
Memphis City School's school improvement planning process	30	3.9	36	3.6	38	4.3	46	4.3	33	4.1	54	3.5
Use of the model with administrators, faculty, parents, students, and others in planning school improvements	55	4.3	67	4.5	63	4.6	77	4.6	33	4.1	31	3.7
Team building strategies	51	4.3	69	4.6	86	4.9	62	4.5	44	4.3	8	3.5
Use of data in planning school improvements	50	4.3	50	4.3	50	4.5	67	4.6	56	4.2	31	3.8
Commitment of your school to educational improvement	62	4.5	69	4.6	63	4.5	62	4.5	78	4.8	42	4.3
Overall assesment of the planning model, its use, and potential	56	4.4	82	4.7	75	4.8	46	4.4	44	4.3	39	3.9

g Percent is the proportion of respondents indicating "excellent" (5) for a given item. "Mean" is based on a five-point scale (1="Poor"; 5="excellent"); N=56.

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- expansion of student participation, and
- change in format for meals during training.

Most valuable aspects of the training. The following aspects were identified in open-ended responses as the most valuable aspects of training:

- team and consensus building; sharing ideas; considering all opinions (13 responses),
- understanding the process and methodologies of strategic planning (8 responses),
- competencies and commitments of the trainers/facilitators (4 responses),
- work environment in which everyone was comfortable (2 responses),
- focus on community involvement; sharing information with teachers (2 responses),
- understanding the relationship between schools and business in strategic planning,
- understanding concerns relating to change and the need to manage change,
- affinity process, and
- awareness of all responsibilities of teachers that go beyond actual teaching.

Recommendations for future training. The following recommendations were offered in open-ended responses:

- Involve more parents. (4 responses)
- Distribute handouts as activities progress; have notebook of handouts. (2 responses)
- Analyze data prior to the meetings.
- Spend more time developing action plans.
- Have trainers visit schools prior to sessions, sit in on classes, and review data.
- Use school district staff as co-trainers.
- Have all members of school teams participate.
- Initiate school improvement plans earlier in the year.
- Include extra time for facilitation skills training.

• Improve the food served during training.

Other comments. When asked to make other comments, nine respondents praised the facilitators' leadership. Responses included the following: "The facilitators were fantastic, dedicated, enthusiastic and knowledgeable"; "appreciate time given in sharing techniques and knowledge"; "trainers were responsive to our needs"; "example of professionalism and humanism"; and "superior; very good."

Three responses focused on the participatory process of the training: "Enjoyed brainstorming, analyzing materials, synthesizing information, round table brainstorming and pulling together of the persons involved, especially input from the students"; "session was an excellent experience"; and "participants worked well together and shared ideas."

The following comments were also offered:

• "Appreciated being treated as a contributing adult and professional."

• "Marriage between the education and business community is very positive."

• "More multi-faceted activities like this are needed."

• "The training was fun.

• "It will not be as beneficial to other schools if they do this next year without the same presenter. He was very knowledgeable and was able to steer us along,"

• "Being away from school let us devote 100% of our concentration to this program. It was also great this was done during school time and we were not required to stay after school to work on this; put us in a much better frame of mind for us to have an open mind."

• "Thanks for a great planning session and refocusing of our goal!"

• "I do not trust the school board to aid us. We've known the answers but no one has listened."

• "The training has empowered us by showing us that we can better use resources that we have, with additional assistance from the central office, to change things at the school level."

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APPENDIX

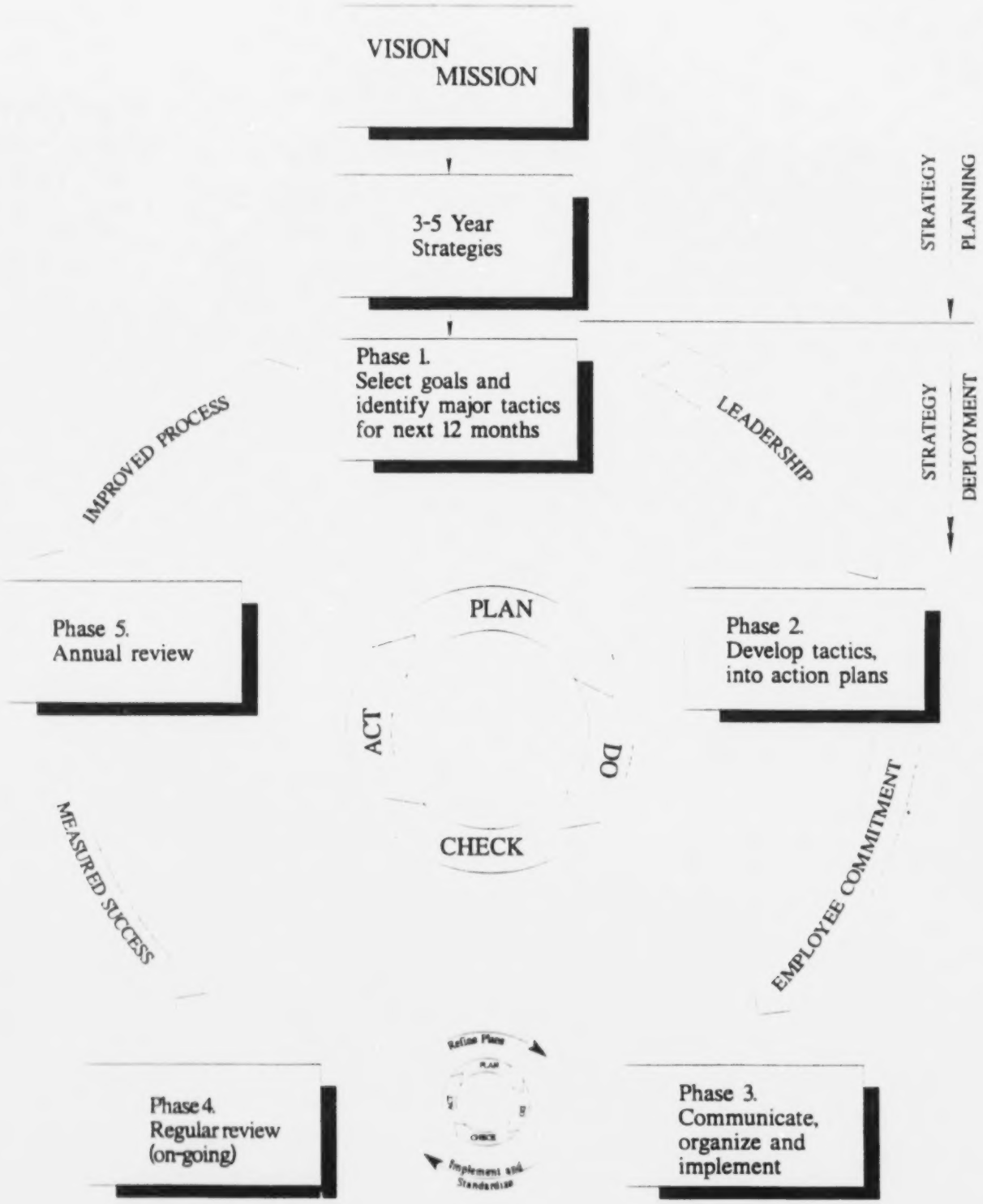
Strategic Planning Training Materials

Evaluation Questionnaire

Strategic Planning Training Materials

Spring 1994

Memphis Center for Urban Partnerships



Memphis City Schools Pilot Strategic

For further information about the strategic planning training documents, please contact:

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Evaluation of Strategic Planning Training, Spring 1994
Memphis Center for Urban Partnerships (MCUP) - Memphis City Schools (MCS)

Indicate your responses by circling or marking through the correct number.
(If you do not have an opinion regarding an item, do not mark a number)

A. RATE THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF THE TRAINING:

	Poor		Good		Excellent
1. New information provided	1	2	3	4	5
2. Practical application of information provided	1	2	3	4	5
3. Relevance of information to school needs/concern	1	2	3	4	5
4. Activities utilized in the training	1	2	3	4	5
5. Quality of the materials provided	1	2	3	4	5
6. Organization of the training schedule	1	2	3	4	5
7. Response of participants to the training	1	2	3	4	5
8. Overall rating of the training	1	2	3	4	5

B. INDICATE YOUR CURRENT LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING RELATING TO:

	Poor		Good		Excellent
9. Elements of the Strategic Planning Model	1	2	3	4	5
10. Relevance of the model to school improvements	1	2	3	4	5
11. Timeline for implementing the model	1	2	3	4	5
12. Role of the school leadership team in implementing the model	1	2	3	4	5
13. Memphis City Schools School Improvement Planning Process	1	2	3	4	5
14. Use of the model with administrators, faculty, parents, students and others in planning school improvements	1	2	3	4	5
15. Team building strategies	1	2	3	4	5
16. Use of data in planning school improvements	1	2	3	4	5
17. Commitment of your school to educational improvement	1	2	3	4	5
18. Overall assessment of the Planning Model, its use, and potential	1	2	3	4	5

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C. DEMOGRAPHICS:

19. Indicate your position for the current school year.

a. If in a school site: Administrator_____ Teacher_____

Other (Please identify_____

b. If not in a school site, which do you represent?

Memphis City Schools _____ Parent Group _____

Community _____ College/University _____

MCUP Board _____ MCUP Evaluation Team _____

Other (Please identify) _____

D. OPINIONS/SUGGESTIONS:

20. Topics/activities I would suggest for future training sessions are:

21. The most valuable aspects of the training for me was:

22. The single change I would make in the training is:

23. Additional comments:

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Thank you for completing this evaluation.

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